

'Their colour emanations are harmonious, though it is still dark. Their trees make pleasing music in the wind.'

'Peenay?'

'Their perfumed flowers and shrubs are exquisite, the stream tinkles happily. The little creatures sleep peacefully in the ground and in the trees.'

'Dorlyn?'

'A suggestion, Belnar?'

'Certainly.'

'Hide our ship. These people are not wholly peaceable.'

'Your reason, Dorlyn.'

'Much radio-activity towards the pole. A memorial to beautiful beings guarded by monstrous weapons. Many columns in their printed writings which could only mean names of their dead.'

'I must see . . . and judge. Let us hide our ship.'

'BELNAR! . . . BELNAR! . . .'

A frightening cry, growing louder; and Telwyn was there. Great, horror-filled eyes staring at each of them in turn. He turned urgently to Belnar.

'Belnar! . . . We must leave! . . . At once. It is impossible to stay here. Hurry! . . . Belnar, take us from here swiftly lest we, too, are contaminated.'

'Telwyn! . . . Calm yourself! . . . You are like a frightened child. Calm yourself, and tell me what you have seen.'

Quietly, gently, the leader tried to quieten him, but he was too badly frightened to listen.

'Come and see! It is indescribable, it is too horrible to explain. All of you, come and see. We must leave! . . . Now! . . . Before it is too late!'

'All right, Telwyn, we will come.'

Close together, they lifted, and went out to see what had frightened Telwyn. In the strengthening dawn light they paused as they saw two sculptures. An athlete in the act of throwing a disk and a woman whose arms were missing. Belnar studied them.

'Very, very old,' he mused. 'They are beautiful people. . . .'

'No! Belnar. No. . . . No! Nuclear wars have passed. They are no longer the same. No longer beautiful!'

'Show me, Telwyn.'

The first golden beams of this world's star came to give brilliance and colour to the things which had so terrified Telwyn.

'This is only an exhibition of sculptures and paintings,' Belnar said, not at first seeing what Telwyn had meant.

'But, Belnar . . . they are horrible! Look! This figure! It is monstrous. A mother and baby . . . as a guess. Why, our uglibeasts have more grace than this. . . .'

Belnar shuddered. 'I would not care to meet anyone with so variegated a skin pattern. The woman is so malformed as to make me quite ill to look at her . . . and the child. It is meant to be a child, isn't it?'

'Belnar . . . over here!'

'Coming!'

'What kind of people are these, who are nothing but large and small ovals with holes in each?'

Belnar stared at them. With mounting fear and nausea they examined the sculptures. The strange wire-like people. The contorted, jagged-edged people. The brilliantly coloured ceramic people. The ones with no recognizable form. They examined the vast array of paintings. The bodies which ended in trees with eyes and feet attached oddly to the branches.

The nightmares of colour and darkness. The horrors of distortion. Emanations screamed from the colours, screamed from minds twisted and deranged to have produced them.

Sickened, violated in spirit, Belnar gathered the others.

'We must leave at once. This is a sick world. These are, can only be, mutated people. Mutations caused by nuclear wars. We cannot exchange cultural knowledge with minds and bodies like these. Lift, everyone. Let us go.'

The seven lifted and returned to the ship. Peenay clutched a souvenir, a plaque he had snatched in passing. He waited for the others to enter before trying to manoeuvre it in through the door.

Sounds of shrill, screaming voices and running feet frightened him. He dropped the plaque, hurried in, and closed the door.

'Lift! . . . before it is too late!' he cried urgently. The blue radiance glowed. The tiny black ship shot upward, and they sped thankfully away from the mutated world.

The children found the plaque five hundred yards from the exhibition.

